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Randolph AFB, Texas



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Nearly \$200 Million Air Force radar site sits empty

03/25/2006

By **MICHAEL GRACZYK / Associated Press**

Sheriff David Doran slides a key in a lock, pulls a door open, looks down and cautiously glances left and right. And then up.

"I always look for snakes," the Schleicher County sheriff said. "This is a rattlesnake haven. I've seen them hanging out the door."

Then he steps inside a building next to an odd pyramid-shaped edifice, carefully walks around some rodent droppings at the door threshold and steps back a generation into the Cold War and into what the Air Force called PAVE PAWS.

The nearly dozen desert tan-painted structures perched on the highest spot in his rocky, goat-raising county about 175 miles west of San Antonio cost nearly \$200 million to build in the early 1980s, county Judge Johnny Griffin said. It was home to powerful radar devices installed on two of the three sides of the 10-story pyramid that dominates the cluster of buildings and juts into the horizon like some weird giant drive-in movie theater.

But in 1995, it was shuttered, a cost-cutting measure by the military because it no longer was needed. Other technology replaced it and the Soviet submarine fleet was rusting in ports, no longer capable of hurling sea-launched ballistic missiles the radar was supposed to detect. Many of the station's components were cannibalized and moved to a similar site outside Fairbanks, Alaska.

Now, more than a decade later, PAVE PAWS is still empty, still on the Air Force books, but merely an unidentified curiosity for motorists traveling nearby U.S. Highway 277.

Doran and his deputies routinely travel the unmarked bumpy asphalt road leading to the site as part of their daily patrols in the 1,311-acre county. But that hasn't stopped vandals from getting over fences topped with razor wire, from shooting out locks and door handles to try to get into some of the buildings, or using the paved parking lot bordered by goat and cattle ranches as a meeting place for illegal drug deals.

Griffin, who for the past 28 years has been the top elected official in Schleicher County, believes the property could be used for legitimate purposes.

"If they made a hay barn out of it, it would be better than what it's doing. I think the county could get in the alfalfa hay business and use that and fill it up," Griffin said. "It's got to have to have some use of some kind. It just seems absolutely stupid to me that we can just have such a cavalier attitude toward a \$183 million taxpayer facility."

It wasn't supposed to be that way.

The Texas station was one of four PAVE PAWS installations, the first going active in 1979 at Cape Cod, Mass. The "PAVE" was what the Air Force calls the "program name for electronic systems." The "PAWS"

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is an acronym for "Phased Array Warning System." Unlike the traditional mechanical spinning disk radar, PAVE PAWS used a physically fixed antenna and aimed it electronically by controlling the timing of signals it sent and received.

In 1983, the Schleicher County site was selected. Its proximity to Goodfellow Air Force Base, 40 miles to the north in San Angelo, didn't hurt. The base provided support and the radar site helped remove Goodfellow from a Defense Department base closure list.

Eldorado went active in 1987, primarily monitoring the middle and southern Pacific Ocean areas and sending its data to the Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station near Colorado Springs, Colo. — headquarters for the nation's air warning network.

It was staffed by U.S. and Canadian Air Force personnel along with employees of Raytheon Corp., a \$20 billion Massachusetts-based defense and aerospace contractor. Local workers performed tasks such as maintenance, although some county residents had feared the station would make their area a Soviet target.

"The reason we supported it was we thought we might get some high-paid, well-educated people to move to our community," like physicists and scientists, Griffin said.

"We had one person move here. I talked to this one guy from Raytheon. Nice guy from Boston. He had a Ph.D. He wanted to live in Eldorado but his wife wouldn't even consider it," he said.

San Angelo, where most of the military and contractor people working at the radar station chose to live, has about 80,000 residents. Schleicher County, on the other hand, has a population of about 2,900.

When it became clear the operation was closing, Griffin said he went to Austin to see then-Gov. George W. Bush and asked if something could be made of the place to benefit his area, maybe a training or vocational center. Nothing happened.

Ken Spain, spokesman for U.S. Rep. Michael Conaway, R-Midland, whose 11th District covers all or parts of three dozen West Texas counties, including Schleicher, said the Air Force is keeping the property in case "conditions change" that would necessitate its reactivation.

"However, reconstituting the mission would be considerably challenging since all hardware except the site's diesel generators were transferred," he said.

Inside the pyramid, the radar attached to two exterior walls was cooled by hundreds of feet of water pipe. The radar was shipped to Alaska, but the pipe remains, along with old office supplies, computers and electronic equipment; a vacant cafeteria and kitchen; and two almost locomotive-size power generators — one of them carrying a tag that shows the oil last was drained on Sept. 12, 1995.

Mold grows on some of the interior corridors. And in the silence of the clammy environment, there's an occasional rumble. Doran says it's likely from ringtails — wild animals resembling cats with raccoon-like tails — that wander inside ductwork.

What's left among the other buildings is an abandoned firehouse, armory, warehouse and concrete and bulletproof glass-encased guardhouse, complete with gunports.

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For Doran, his department's patrol duty represents a full circle for him. In the early days of the installation, he was among the handful of locals who did maintenance work. Now, he's got the keys to the place, he said.

"I never envisioned this place closing down," Doran said. "But it did. It no longer had a mission."

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On-base schools flying high

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Jenny LaCoste-Caputo
Express-News Staff Writer

Want to send your kids to the best public schools in Texas?

Join the military.

San Antonio's three independent school districts on military bases consistently score better on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills than most other districts.

And their students — who graduate and go to college at higher-than-average rates — are regularly among the city's top performers on national tests and college entrance exams.

Even though the districts have the same challenges as many struggling urban schools — an ethnically diverse population, high rates of children who come from poor homes, and staggering mobility rates — they have a stellar reputation for closing the achievement gap between Anglo and minority students.

In fact, they regularly outpace other schools on standardized tests such as the TAKS.

To be sure, schools on military bases have distinct advantages.

While families there may not be rich, every family gets a steady paycheck, every family has access to high-quality health care, and students are used to a culture of discipline — a condition that makes teachers' jobs much easier.

But another silver bullet may explain the success of on-base schools: Money.

Because of military districts' unique situation, they have twice as much money to spend per student as the average Texas school district.

Texas taxpayers shelled out more than \$17 million last year to fund San Antonio's three tiny military school districts, which serve a total of just over 3,000 students, and the federal government pitched in another \$19 million.

As state legislators prepare to return to Austin on April 17 to try once again to devise a plan to fund Texas public schools adequately, they might look to the military districts for inspiration.

"Those that say money doesn't matter should take a look at our military districts," said Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, D-San Antonio. "There is a direct correlation between the amount of resources you have and the type of programs you can offer in school and the quality of your teachers. It is about the money."

Behind the gate

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They are Texas public schools, supported by state and federal tax money, yet most people never get a glimpse of what they look like.

The campuses are sheltered behind tall fences and armed guards. Only those with official business can pass through the gate.

San Antonio's three military school districts are something of an oddity. They are the only independent school districts in Texas housed entirely on military bases, out of only seven such districts in the nation.

The schools are funded in part with state money, yet the land they sit on yields no property tax.

They also get a hefty helping of federal dollars. At a time when most Texas school districts are struggling to make ends meet by freezing salaries and cutting programs, San Antonio's military districts are flush.

All told, the military districts — Fort Sam Houston, Randolph Field and Lackland — have nearly 50 percent more to spend per student than do San Antonio's urban and suburban districts.

According to financial data from the Texas Education Agency, Fort Sam had \$10,755 to spend per student last school year, Randolph had \$11,281, and Lackland had \$12,617.

Compare that to \$5,990 in Alamo Heights, \$6,012 in Northside, and \$6,253 in North East.

Larry Stavinocha, executive director of business for the Fort Sam Houston Independent School District, said military students have unique challenges — challenges that can be expensive to overcome.

Students often are dealing with one or both parents stationed overseas in dangerous situations, they may have attended half a dozen schools or more in their lifetime, or they may be transferring in as seniors from a different state, but still must pass the TAKS to graduate.

"Our kids have a lot of different needs than kids in a traditional public school setting," Stavinocha said. "But I would say we're in a more favorable situation than most districts in Texas. We realize we've got it good."

Though they are on federal land, they are held to every Texas rule and standard, just as any other school district. They are subject to open-records laws, their students must take the TAKS, and they are ranked in the state's accountability system.

State law governs how the school districts are funded. Because the districts can't levy property taxes, they receive state assistance based on the average tax rate for Bexar County — \$1.50 per \$100 valuation — and the county's average property value.

The military districts also receive federal impact aid for students with connections to the military that can total several thousand dollars per student.

The federal impact aid follows the children, so if they attend another district, such as Northside or Judson, those districts receive money from the federal government.

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But the amount is highest for the children of active-duty personnel living on a military base — which describes the majority of students at Fort Sam Houston, Randolph Field and Lackland.

Besides full coffers, the districts have other advantages, including fewer students than most public school districts and a military system that ensures fewer disciplinary problems from students who know their bad behavior can have serious consequences for their parents.

Their existence also cuts revenue to surrounding school districts — such as Judson, Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City or North East near Randolph — when students actually live within their boundaries but attend school on base.

At Randolph, more than half the students who attend the schools don't live on the base, though all have a base connection. Their parents have to work, either as civilians or active duty military, on base.

The district received a special waiver from the state and federal government to serve the off-base kids, because Randolph demolished much of its base housing a few years ago and still hasn't rebuilt it.

A handful of students at Fort Sam and Lackland live off base. Their families have to be on the waiting list for base housing to attend school on base. The schools also allow students in high school to stay until graduation if their parents recently retired and moved off base.

Most of the Randolph students living off base are in the Judson Independent School District or the Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City Independent School District.

Jose Elizondo, Judson's chief financial officer, said his school district still gets about \$600,000 in federal impact aid, and he doesn't mind Randolph serving kids who live in Judson.

"We have so much growth, and a lot of our schools are at capacity or nearing capacity," Elizondo said. "We're thinking, 'Thank you,' because we don't have room for all those kids."

Money and success

Jayne Hatton, principal of Fort Sam Houston Elementary, said her school's high test scores and phenomenal academic success aren't simply the product of more money.

"The difference is we have a goal of high expectations," she said. "Our goal is to have everyone exposed to grade-level material and to take the TAKS on grade level. That's our philosophy. Students will rise to your expectations if you provide the support they need."

But Richard Middleton, North East Independent School District superintendent, said more money gives military districts a distinct leg up.

He said he hopes legislators are paying attention to how districts with twice the funding of the average Texas district are faring.

"Military districts have smaller classes, fewer discipline issues and more money. That doesn't mean they don't work for their success, but they do have some interesting advantages," he said.

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"If I had \$10,000 to spend per student, class sizes would immediately go down, we'd hire more aides and assistants for our special ed students and students learning English, and we'd be more competitive with our salaries.

"We'd look more like the military districts. I see them as role models of good practice."

Jeff Duffield, spokesman for Randolph Field Independent School District, is quick to note military districts must plan ahead and stretch their dollars.

He said the per-pupil amount of \$10,000-plus can be deceiving. While military districts are doing fine financially, they're not exactly worry-free when it comes to money.

Just as the districts can't raise property taxes, they can't ask voters to approve a bond issue. That means any new construction or renovations have to come from the district's general fund.

So districts don't generally spend the entire \$10,000 per student — they keep some in reserve for future construction or renovation projects.

The districts can apply for grants from the U.S. Department of Education for construction, but they're notoriously hard to get. Districts usually must prove a safety concern to get the grant.

Still, on-base schools often don't have to worry as much about money for school buildings, since their population varies little.

Bexar County school districts built no fewer than 16 new schools last year to keep up with growth. Military school districts are more likely to renovate and improve existing buildings, or build new classroom wings for additional space.

"Our facilities money has to come from what's left over after paying for everything else," Duffield said. "We have to save to do any improvements."

And Randolph has been saving.

The district just completed a renovation of its elementary school. Classrooms were expanded and decades-old windows were replaced with sound-proof glass to help cut out the noise of jet engines on the runways behind the school.

The district also recently built a new middle school wing. Current construction projects include remodeling the high school gymnasium and building a fine arts building for choir, art and band classes.

And the district can pay for luxuries that aren't common in other Texas schools, such as an elementary school art studio. During the recent renovations, two classrooms were turned into one huge studio, complete with a separate room with a pottery kiln.

Students from kindergarten through fifth grade go to art class once a week.

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"It is so sad to me that every elementary student doesn't have access to something like this," art teacher Linda Heier said. "It enriches everything they do with language arts, with math, with so many things. We have first-graders working on reasoning and logic schools. There is innate problem solving in the projects we do."

The difference in funding also is obvious at the high school.

Randolph is in its third year of a program to provide laptop computers to all students. By next year, all students from ninth through 12th grade will have laptops of their own to use throughout their high school career, then take with them when they graduate.

Right now, each freshman, sophomore and junior has his or her own computer.

While a handful of districts across the state — including Pleasanton, Irving and Arlington — assign laptop computers to individual students for use during the school year, the Texas Education Agency isn't aware of any other district in the state that gives students computers to keep.

"They told me I get to keep it. I didn't believe them at first," said D'Mario Noble, 14, a freshman at Randolph High School.

D'Mario, whose mother is in the Air Force, moved to San Antonio just a few weeks ago. He said he's never been to a school with such resources.

"I like this school better than my last school. My mom was really happy that I have my own computer to work on now."

Focus on individuals

Lackland's superintendent, David Splitek, said money is always a concern, even for his district. Federal funding can be uncertain, and watching Congress' every move to see if things will change is nerve-racking.

Federal impact aid isn't budgeted a year in advance, and it's always subject to be cut if Congress slashes the federal budget — which happens from time to time.

That means Splitek has to budget for a school year based on an estimate of what he expects to receive from the federal government.

This year, Lackland didn't get its federal payment until the end of January because lawmakers were slow to approve the budget.

"We're a small district, but we still have to make payroll," Splitek said.

Still, Splitek is the first to say he has few complaints at Lackland. He spent years as a top administrator in the San Antonio Independent School District, where he said he missed contact with the school environment.

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At Lackland, Splitek can walk out of his office and onto the joint campus of the base's elementary and junior-senior high school in seconds.

Being in charge of a district of fewer than 900 students has advantages. As Splitek walks the halls of his schools, he says hello and calls by name every teacher, aide, nurse and custodian he encounters.

"The air is little bit fresher at Lackland," Splitek is fond of saying. "I'm having the time of my life."

Leaders of San Antonio's military districts concede the success of their schools might not translate in another independent school district. A strong base of parent support and a student population accustomed to racial diversity makes a huge difference in their ability to educate kids.

"I don't have gangs. I don't have race issues," said Warren Shumaker, a history and economics teacher at Lackland High School. "The biggest bonus is we're so small; nobody falls through the cracks. My big classes are 17 to 20 students. Nobody fails unless they're trying really hard to."

Splitek said his teachers are able to identify every child who may struggle to pass a class or do well on the TAKS. All of those children then stay after school for extra tutoring.

At Fort Sam Houston's Cole Junior-Senior High School, Principal Rolando Rios schedules class times during the day for tutoring. Some teachers lead tutoring sessions as part of their regular course schedule.

Most public schools couldn't afford such a luxury.

"That wouldn't happen in a bigger school," Rios said. "You wouldn't have the flexibility to allow teachers to tutor one period, teach classes, and still have their planning time."

The results are obvious when graduation time rolls around.

Cole's 69 seniors already have earned \$4.5 million in scholarship offers this year. At least two students in the school's JROTC program received appointments to U.S. military academies, and others earned ROTC scholarships.

Lackland's 27 seniors earned more than \$1 million in scholarships.

Fort Sam Houston Superintendent Gail Siller said it's important to remember that military kids have unique needs and challenges, and often a district that caters specifically to that population is the best choice.

"We have kids that have moved three or four times just in their high school career," she said. "We're used to dealing with those kinds of issues."

Samantha Valdez, a seventh-grader at Cole Junior-Senior High School, already has called five places home, including Germany and Guam. Both parents are in the military, and her dad is now in Iraq.

"It's kind of nice that everyone is from the same background," she said. "I used to say I was born in Germany and it would be a big deal. I say it here, and 10 other kids say, 'Yeah, me too.'"

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Where will they land?

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Sig Christenson
Express-News Military Writer

There's a fork in the road ahead for Maj. William Lee, a veteran Air Force instructor pilot who has a job he loves and a wife who's battled breast cancer.

When it comes time to stay in uniform, will he remain or leave?

"Beyond flying, there are always opportunities," said Lee, whose wife, Caren, was diagnosed one year ago. "So I have not so much a bigger picture, but I have a bigger perspective."

These are strange days to be an Air Force pilot at the career crossroads. A war is on, hours are long, deployments are frequent. Airlines that once snapped up pilots are struggling to survive.

The service wants to cut 23,000 people this year and thin a flock of planes that in some cases are a half-century old. Amid the turmoil, a shortage of pilots, one of its biggest long-term problems, appears to have quietly ended.

"In the aggregate, the pilot shortage is over," said Maj. Gen. Glenn Spears, the Air Force's point man on the service's future pilot force. "It's a good-news story in my opinion, and it's a result of many factors — some of them we should take credit for, and some others honestly are out of our control."

Thin on pilots for a decade, the Air Force last week said it has 329 more fliers than it needs. That's a turnaround from seven years ago, when it had just 90 percent of the pilots needed.

But problems persist. The Air Force will eliminate 50,000 positions over the coming years in the active-duty and Reserve components. Pilots will be among those fired. Spears said work is ongoing on how many jobs will be cut across a range of specialties.

No quick fixes

A debate is under way among Air Force leaders over whether the 1,100 fledgling fliers who earn their wings each year in Texas and three other states are too many or too few for the service's needs.

Gen. William R. Looney III, head of the Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB, said the matter has yet to be decided by Gen. T. Michael "Buzz" Moseley, the Air Force's chief of staff.

"There's two sides of the argument here," Looney said. "One is for a plus-up and the other is for a decrease, and we haven't gotten to a resolution yet as to what we're going to do."

The Air Force has produced 1,100 pilots a year since 1999 to make up for its shortage. Today it boasts 13,691 of them.

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But within that number, the service is 6 percent below strength in fighters. It also needs more helicopter and special operations pilots, in part because those roles have expanded since 2001.

There are no quick fixes.

A veteran pilot such as Lt. Col. Jack Burns, 42, of Cibolo, won't likely fly the Air Force's newest plane, the F-22 Raptor. He's spent 18 years in the cockpits of trainer, cargo and refueling planes. Fliers for the stealthy Raptor instead will come from the ranks of veteran fighter pilots, said Spears, the Air Force's director of force management policy.

Burns, instructor pilot Lee and Maj. Curtis "Cujo" Johnson are part of a force that is staying in uniform longer, with nearly six of every 10 pilots on the job for at least 14 years — well above the average since 1991. The number of pilots re-upping and taking \$125,000 bonuses paid out over five years under the Aviator Continuation Pay program is above average.

Pilots who began training after Oct. 1, 1999, can't leave the Air Force or take the \$125,000 bonus until they have served 10 years. Those who entered flight training before then can re-up or leave after eight years.

Johnson, 35, of San Antonio, took a different bonus, which pays \$25,000 a year from 2004 to 2015. His decision to stay was, like that of many other pilots, tied to intangibles professional and often deeply personal.

A T-37 Tweet instructor pilot at Randolph with time in the A-10 Thunderbolt attack plane, Johnson saw an airline industry in a hiring slump and got a boost from his wife, Karin, who encouraged him to stay in the Air Force.

"By the bonus being there, it just made it financially competitive to stay in the military as opposed to going off to another career field where I could have earned more," Johnson said.

Decisions, decisions

Maj. Tommy Hudnall, 35, of San Antonio, stayed after commanders allowed him to serve at Maxwell AFB in Montgomery, Ala., three hours from the nursing home where his elderly grandmother lived. Eight months later, she was hospitalized with a hip fracture. He was the only family member there.

"It worked out for a reason," said Hudnall, who came to Randolph last fall but wants to be stationed at Columbus AFB, Miss., a 90-minute drive from his grandmother, who is 98.

Cibolo's Burns is engaged and has two children, John, 17, and Olivia, 14, in high school. He doesn't want to move, a real possibility if he stays after 20 years. But he isn't sure about life in the airline business, where he'd be away from home 20 days a month.

"I've got to weigh professional decisions, I've got to make personal decisions, I have to financially support the family," Burns said, adding he wants to put his kids through college and remain in some sort of aviation job. "I don't know what I want to do at this moment."

One complication is that the flying options aren't as good post-9-11.

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Lexington Institute analyst Loren Thompson said the Air Force must jettison 30-year-old F-15 and F-16 fighters, as well as tankers and cargo planes that in some cases flew during the Eisenhower years.

"People have this misconception that because we have the biggest Air Force in the world we also have the most modern," Thompson said. "But the fact is that all of our airframes are left over from the Cold War."

That means Lee, who comes up for his bonus next year, may not return to the F-16 Fighting Falcon, the jet he used to fly.

Lee, a 35-year-old T-38 instructor pilot from Schertz, could wind up in a ground-based cubicle guiding unmanned aerial vehicles, but it's an unappetizing alternative for him and many other fliers.

There are other options. He's thought about getting into real estate, but leans toward the Air Force. Lee keeps an open mind about flying helicopters and even taking ground jobs, another area in which the Air Force needs veteran pilots.

Talk at the officers club often turns to the future, and the coming cuts raise concern, he and others say. But there's no sense of crisis or panic in this brave new world of an Air Force that has gone from a dearth of pilots to a modest glut — just shop talk among peers.

"On Friday afternoon we sit down and talk about what we're contemplating, kind of a sounding board," Lee said. "The guys talk about what kind of assignment would you be looking at. Really, from here, what's next?"



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'BRAC to the Future': A sequel

That sigh of relief may have been premature; another round possible.

By SIG CHRISTENSON
EXPRESS-NEWS MILITARY WRITER

The 2005 base closure round was thought by many to be the Pentagon's final chance to shutter bases and save billions. But that might well be wishful thinking.

BRAC is far from dead, experts say. In fact, chances are good that more base closures lie ahead. They might even become a permanent feature of the Pentagon's landscape.

"There are lots of people who say there will never be another BRAC," said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Sue E. Turner of San Antonio. "That's mostly because they survived this time and hope there's not another BRAC, but from a practical standpoint there could be."

Turner was one of nine members of last year's Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission that closed 22 installations, including Brooks City-Base. The commission overruled the Defense Department's BRAC wish list and ultimately saved six bases the military wanted closed.



CHRISTENSON

That the Pentagon might try again wouldn't be unexpected. But the BRAC commission itself opened the door to future closure rounds as it wrapped up its business last fall.

It suggested that future Pentagon leaders release the Quadrennial Defense Review, a blueprint for future military operations issued every four years, in time for future closure commissions to study it. Turner and her fellow commissioners said this year's document, which was released after BRAC handed down its final closure list, could have helped deliberations.

Yet more telling of where things might go is a single sentence buried in Appendix R of the commission's voluminous report: "In fact, initiating a new BRAC round should be considered by the secretary of defense in eight-year intervals following every alternate QDR" — a closure round every eight years.

Most of those interviewed for this story were unaware the commission made that suggestion, but Turner cautioned that it wasn't meant to be a call for regularly scheduled BRAC rounds. She termed eight years "the next reasonable time" for a sixth closure — if it's sought — a view echoed by some in Washington.

Still, Mayor Phil Hardberger and others concede the recommendation is a reminder that the base closure process has a life of its own. And the military is so important to San Antonio "that we can't afford not to always keep the possibility

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Panel recommends eight-year timeline

CONTINUED FROM 1H

of another BRAC in the back of our minds," he said.

BRAC has been seen by defense leaders as a way to save money by eliminating excess infrastructure. The commission said its cuts in 2005 are expected to save \$4.2 billion annually for the next 20 years.

Four prior rounds saw 97 major installations closed, about 21 percent of the Defense Department's infrastructure, including Kelly AFB. The Government Accountability Office estimates those closures have saved \$6.6 billion a year.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had hoped with last year's closure round to save more money than the four others combined.

But its larger purpose, beyond saving billions that could be channeled into new weapons systems, was to put a bow on Rumsfeld's top priority — forcing profound changes in military culture by creating more interservice "joint" operations.

Neither happened.

The commission rejected the Pentagon's call to shutter six installations, among them Naval Shipyard Portsmouth in Maine and Submarine Base New London, Conn., following spirited community protests. In its final report, the commissioners also said that "very few" Pentagon closure and realignment proposals actually increased jointness.

Brooks fell, as did Naval Station Ingleside on the South Texas coast, but the Pentagon didn't close Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, as had been recommended.

Meanwhile, the commission delivered the best BRAC present ever to the Alamo City — 13,575 new workers, students and families to Fort Sam Houston, plus \$2 billion in new construction for the post.

Today, a newly formed committee in San Antonio is pondering how to help the military implement the many new missions coming to the city. There has been no thought of

another BRAC or consideration of laying the groundwork for challenging a new closure round.

City Councilman Richard Perez, who chairs the city's Military Affairs Committee, said he wasn't aware of the BRAC commission's recommendation but doesn't think another closure round will come soon.

That's a common view. Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchison and John Cornyn, both R-Texas, see no legislative appetite for another BRAC.

Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff said he thinks it will take a decade for the Defense Department to digest the 2005 round and assess its effectiveness. Dealing with BRAC, he said, is disruptive to communities and distracts them from other things, such as economic development.

But retired Air Force Col. William Ehrie, chairman of the Texas Military Preparedness Commission, said base-closure rounds are indeed a form of economic development. Towns with bases typically have military affairs committees that track such issues, he said, adding, "You treat it as a business deal."

Meanwhile, six months after BRAC, the party has ended in Texarkana and a sense of urgency is back in the air. Civic leaders are digging in for another BRAC and expect a third consecutive assault on their depot, with 3,500 jobs the region's largest and best employer.

The depot has been on the BRAC hit list twice since 1995, and leaders know they can't replace jobs that average \$35,000 a year.

"If you've been on the list twice you've got to know that somebody someplace doesn't think you're as good as some of the other players in the field," said Jerry Sparks, chairman of the Texarkana Chamber of Commerce's BRAC committee. "We have serious competitors. They're not walking away."

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San Antonio Express News

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AETC News Clips

Air Force Times



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Former Keesler CO imparts lessons learned from Katrina

By [Bruce Rolfen](#)

Times staff writer

With the June 1 start of the 2006 Hurricane season approaching, the commander who saw Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., through Hurricane Katrina is offering his lessons learned.

“It was like going into combat with your families,” recalled Maj. Gen. William Lord, who was commander of Keesler’s 81st Training Wing when the monster storm pounded the Gulf Coast last year.

About 6,000 of the base’s 16,000 students and personnel rode out the storm at Keesler. All survived thanks to buildings designed to withstand winds of 150 to 175 mph, Lord said

The commander credited the base’s twice-annual hurricane drills as one reason it was able to shelter everyone. Those who wanted to leave before Katrina made landfall on Aug. 29, were given an evacuation notice 12 hours before local civilian authorities issued their notices.

Most of Keesler’s training courses are up and running again, according to base officials. They expect about 38,000 students to attend classes this year.

Lord, a career communications officer, is assigned currently to Air Force headquarters at the Pentagon as director of information, services and integration for the chief information officer.

When not at the Pentagon, Lord teaches a two-hour course at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., to new wing commanders. It also covers dealing with natural disasters.

[Bruce Rolfen](#) may be reached at (703) 750-8647.

Air ForceTimes.com
Daily News Roundup
27 Mar 06



AETC News Clips

Keesler AFB, Miss.



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March 23, 2006, 5:20PM Chron.com

(PRN) Incoming 22nd Air Force Commander Delivers Newest Lockheed Martin C-130J to Keesler Air Force Base

PRNewswire-FirstCall

MARIETTA, Ga., March 23 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Lockheed Martin (NYSE: [LMT](#)) yesterday delivered the second C-130J airlifter of 2006. The aircraft was flown to Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., where it is assigned to the 403rd Wing's 815th Airlift Squadron, Air Force Reserve Command's (AFRC) only C-130J combat delivery squadron.

The aircraft was flown by Maj. Gen. Martin M. Mazick, the director of operations for AFRC, who will soon assume command of the 22nd Air Force, one of the Reserve's three numbered air forces. "I have been flying Lockheed Martin products for 25 years," said Mazick. "I flew C-141s for 19 years and C-5s for five. I am proud to be delivering this new C-130J to Keesler where it will provide increased combat delivery capability to the 403rd."

The 815th Airlift Squadron, known as the Flying Jennies, received its first C-130J, a short-fuselage aircraft in 1999, but is now being equipped with the longer-fuselage aircraft. Today's delivery is the seventh of eight aircraft that will eventually be assigned to the squadron.

Keesler AFB is also home to the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (WRS). Known as the Hurricane Hunters, this unit flies the WC-130J into hurricanes to record and send storm data to ground stations, which helps make predictions of direction and intensity more reliable. The 2005 hurricane season was the first full season the WC-130J was flown into the Atlantic storms. The 53rd WRS operates 10 WC-130Js.

C-130J operators from around the world are now operating at a high tempo in both combat and relief support operations. The United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Australia and Denmark are all experiencing first hand the high reliability and increased range, speed and payload capabilities of the C-130J. This past year also marked the combat debut for the U.S. C-130J fleet, as both the Air National Guard and Marine Corps operated their aircraft in Iraq and Afghanistan. The EC-130J psychological warfare aircraft were also flown on operational missions for the first time.

The newly delivered aircraft is the longer fuselage C-130J, which features a strengthened cargo ramp and improved airdrop system, allowing crews to make airdrops at 250 knots, minimizing exposure to anti-aircraft fire in hostile areas. The Enhanced Cargo Handling System allows for rapidly converting the aircraft from hauling rolling stock to palletized cargo. These aircraft are 112 feet long, 15 feet longer than the short-length C-130J aircraft, which translates to 30 percent more usable volume for increased seating, litters, pallets, or airdrop platforms. In service, two C-130Js often do the work of three legacy C-130E or H-model aircraft.

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AETC News Clips

Keesler AFB, Miss.



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A total of 182 C-130Js are on order, and 137 have been delivered to date. In the U.S., Air Force Reserve Command and Air National Guard units fly C-130Js. The Marine Corps operates KC-130J tankers and the Coast Guard flies the HC-130J, which saw extensive service during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita relief efforts. International C-130J operators include the Royal Air Force, Royal Australian Air Force, Italian Air Force and the Royal Danish Air Force.

The Marine aircraft, often referred to by crews as Battle Herks, are the standard short fuselage version of the Super Hercules. Using only wing and external tanks, the KC-130J has a 57,500 pound (8,455 U.S. gallon) fuel offload capability while being flown on a 500 nautical mile radius mission, compared with 38,000 pounds (5,588 U.S. gallons) for the current fleet of KC-130Fs. The KC-130J is also configured to accept a fuselage tank if required, adding another 24,392 pounds (3,600 U.S. gallons) of available fuel offload to a mission.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 135,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2005 sales of \$37.2 billion.

Mississippi Press

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AETC News Clips

Sheppard AFB, Texas



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27 Mar 06

Welcome to The Falls

New signs tout base's impact on community

By Robert Morgan/Times Record News
March 27, 2006, Page 1A

Future travelers to Wichita Falls could be greeted at the city limits by more than a green, rectangular sign bearing the city's name and a population figure.

Work is under way at the city's Traffic and Transportation Department to design and post more colorful signs to welcome visitors and highlight locations and events.

John Burrus, director of the department, has been spearheading the initiative, an idea birthed by members of the City Council.

There are several designs floating around City Hall. While the designs vary, the message reads the same: "Wichita Falls: Home of Sheppard Air Force Base."

Burrus said the city's sign will also include smaller signs advertising activities sponsored by the Convention and Visitors Bureau, such as the Hotter 'N Hell Hundred and Falls Fest.

While the city is responsible for designing, purchasing and placing the signs, it still has to comply with Texas Department of Transportation guidelines. Burrus said the sign had to be located 30 feet off the road and not exceed a size of 80-square feet, which is still a "big size."

"When people are traveling 70 mph, we want them to see it," Burrus said.

Sign costs are estimated at \$800 to \$1,100 each.

City Manager Darron Leiker credited Jim Ginnings, council member at-large, with coming up with the idea. Leiker said Ginnings suggested the signs during a council meeting as a way to recognize Sheppard's impact on the community.

Ginnings said Friday afternoon he couldn't take credit for the idea. While he was the one to mention the signs publicly, he said council member Linda Ammons, District 2, came up with the idea to promote the city and Sheppard.

Burrus said he thought the sign idea was also in reaction to the loss of Sheppard jobs during the Base Realignment Closure committee. The BRAC closings caused the community "to embrace Sheppard Air Force Base as a partner of the city."

Ammons said she thought the signs were a "great idea."

"We love Sheppard Air Force Base," she said.

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AETC News Clips

Sheppard AFB, Texas



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Her favorite design is an all blue backdrop picturing a white airplane flying across the width of the sign. The sign's letters are yellow.

There is another design depicting a character named Wichita Willie, a local drawing that hearkens back to the 1980s. Willie, who resembles a Twinkie wearing a cowboy hat and sporting a bow tie, is cast on a white background with green print.

Burrus said while the character has historical significance, it would not be used as a sign.

Burrus said the city will probably start with only two signs at different city entrances. He hoped to eventually incorporate several of the city's designs.



AETC News Clips

Vance AFB, Okla.



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Vance tops Chamber's D.C. agenda

By Jeff Mullin Senior Writer

The cherry blossoms will be in bloom around Washington, D.C., this week, and the 94th annual Cherry Blossom Festival will be in full swing, but those in the capital for the annual Greater Enid Chamber of Commerce legislative trip will have their eyes on vastly different fruit.

The 29 local representatives of the chamber, Vance Development Authority, city government, businesses and schools will meet with members of Oklahoma's congressional delegation as well as Pentagon officials.

On the top of the agenda, as it is every year, is Vance Air Force Base.

"Obviously the first and foremost issue for Enid at the federal level is protecting and enhancing Vance Air Force Base," said Jon Blankenship, president and chief executive officer of the chamber.

The issue of base realignment and closure, still looming on the horizon during last year's trip, is no longer a factor with the conclusion of the 2005 BRAC round. Blankenship said the chamber's legislative trips, which have been conducted for many years, played a role in keeping Vance off the BRAC list.

"It's certainly not the sole factor," said Blankenship, "but having that ongoing effort with regularity is very important. I don't think that it's realistic to expect Congress and even the Pentagon are going to take you seriously if you just show up in base closure rounds."

"It is one of the most important things that we do," said Mike Cooper, Vance Development Authority member and chairman of the statewide Oklahoma Strategic Military Planning Commission. "It is an ongoing opportunity to not only brief our delegation on things happening locally but to coordinate all our efforts to expand and enhance the mission at Vance."

The Enid delegation will leave Monday, meet with Pentagon officials Tuesday then spend Wednesday meeting with 2nd District Rep. Dan Boren, D-Muskogee; 3rd District Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Cheyenne; Sen. Tom Coburn; and Sen. Jim Inhofe. Boren is a member of House Armed Services Committee, while Inhofe is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. After hosting a legislative reception Wednesday evening, the group will return to Enid Thursday.

The chamber group will seek funding for a \$15 million consolidated operations center for Vance. The facility will help put Vance's flying training squadrons under one roof.

"It's kind of fragmented the way that's set up right now," said Blankenship.

In the last decade or so, Vance has been awarded roughly \$100 million in military construction projects.

"The vast majority of those projects have been congressional add-ons, they weren't in the original MILCON (military construction) budget," said Blankenship.

"We've got a great track record from what we've done in the past," said Cooper.

Vance already will add new planes and jobs when part of the undergraduate pilot training and Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals programs move here from Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Ga. In addition, Vance will become home to an \$8.7 million Armed Forces Reserve Center.

The Pentagon visit also will include discussion about the 130 acres of land north of Eisenhower Elementary School the city of Enid has offered Vance. The transfer of the property is awaiting final Air Force approval.

Non-Vance issues to be discussed with the delegation will include funding for Cherokee Strip Regional

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AETC News Clips

Vance AFB, Okla.



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Heritage Center, an approximately 5,000-square-foot expansion of the Museum of the Cherokee Strip.

"That's an important project for Enid that has tourism and cultural and economic develop benefits for our region," said Blankenship.

Another topic likely to come up will be President Bush's proposed FY 2007 budget, which eliminates federal funds for career and technical education.

This proposal could cost Oklaho-ma's career tech system some \$18 million annually.

"In Oklahoma's case, we have the prize jewel nationwide (in Autry Technology Center)," said Blankenship. "We are highly recognized as one of the best systems for workforce training that we have, so we certainly don't want to lose funding."



AETC News Clips

Vance AFB, Okla.



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Vance tops Chamber's D.C. agenda

By Jeff Mullin Senior Writer
CNHI News Service

March 26, 2006

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